



socialplatform



Policy paper on an

**EU SOLIDARITY
STRATEGY**

to respond to the
Ukraine crisis

Introduction

Europe has responded with unprecedented solidarity to the war in Ukraine, showing the lengths that EU institutions, Member States and communities are willing to go to defend European values and peace. Social Platform members are exemplifying why a robust, empowered civil society and the not-for profit sector are important actors during times of war and peace. Civil society are providing services and working on the ground to give much needed support to those in Ukraine and those fleeing, including reporting on human rights abuses, arranging for safe exits and transfers within Europe, resettling refugees and providing them with accommodation, access to quality jobs, finding places in schools and other educational settings for children and young people and providing essential and basic needs like food, clothing, medicines, healthcare and psychosocial support.

As the war looks increasingly likely to become a protracted crisis and in light of the cost-of-living crisis fueled by inflation and soaring energy prices, Social Platform recognises that solidarity will take constant work and reassurance across our societies and support from the authorities on local, regional, national and EU levels. At the same time, people living in Europe expect progress on their social rights, and we must not lose focus on implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights in advance of the EU elections in 2024.

The EU should learn from the experience of the pandemic and move beyond short-term planning to adopt an EU Solidarity Strategy that brings together existing measures and ensures a coordinated, well-managed response that keeps communities and institutions in Europe engaged and supportive. This mid- to long-term Solidarity Strategy should cover the following areas.

1. End discrimination among those fleeing

Social Platform members have reported discrimination against those fleeing on the basis of their race, ethnic background or gender. All people living in Ukraine who are fleeing the war should be treated equally, and the Solidarity Strategy should put in place a reporting system so that incidences of discrimination can be recorded and strategies put in place to ensure these experiences are not duplicated across the response. Our member the Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM) is calling for prevention to stop people from becoming undocumented. Furthermore, the Strategy should underline that any refugee fleeing other regions should be treated equally to those fleeing Ukraine, in compliance with commitments under EU and international refugee law. This includes those fleeing Russia and Belarus who are escaping the same regimes involved in waging war.

2. Address financing gaps and provide access to mainstream services and infrastructure

Without additional investment in sectors that are already strained there will be unwelcome competition including for housing, education, healthcare and social services. More investment in services and infrastructure will be necessary to respond to growing need. It is easy to fall back on segregated services in difficult times. In the longer term, segregated services act against inclusion in the community and create tensions between population groups.

The EU has been a steadfast supporter of the transition to community-based services and care. To ensure resources are not diverted into segregated services or away from other equally important social priorities, more funds are needed and current EU funds should be used to provide migrants and refugees with equal access to mainstream services, in line with previous guidelines on the use of EU funds for the inclusion of migrants and refugees. The Strategy should recognise the need for a long-term investment strategy to rebuild Ukraine post-war, considering the weakening of the social system and total destruction of infrastructure in many cities.

3. Tackle the social consequences of the war together

Rising energy prices and inflation will mean that people living in Europe who were already finding it difficult to make ends meet will be particularly affected by the financial repercussions of the war. Member States should coordinate assistance to those affected and ensure that financial tools also contribute to a just transition from a carbon intensive energy system.

4. More inclusive humanitarian aid

Our members have reported that humanitarian aid is not addressing some of the needs of the diversity of people in Ukraine. As our member European Women's Lobby (EWL) [reports](#), the majority of those fleeing Ukraine are women and children. [Caritas Europa](#) has highlighted the increased risks of trafficking in human beings and has mobilised its humanitarian response, also helping with safeguarding procedures. Eurochild [reports](#) the specific needs of children, who are at heightened risk of trafficking and exploitation. All EU responses must therefore include a gender equality and intersectional dimension.

The European Youth Forum notes the need for programmes to include mental health and psychosocial support to those with trauma including those who have experienced sexual violence. [ILGA-Europe](#) and [Transgender Europe](#) report barriers for trans people in accessing transition medicines and EURORDIS [reports](#) difficulties for people with rare diseases in accessing life-saving medicines. Our members European Disability Forum (EDF), [Autism-Europe](#), and the European Association of Service Providers for persons with Disabilities (EASPD) have highlighted the needs of people with disabilities. With older people making up a third of those needing assistance, this conflict can be considered the 'oldest' humanitarian crisis in the world. [AGE Platform Europe](#) stresses the need to collect accurate data, disaggregated by age and gender, to have a clear picture of the situation of older people in Ukraine and those fleeing. Make Mothers Matter (MMM) has reported the precarious situation of mothers fleeing with their children or remaining in the country and the need for pregnancy follow-ups, delivery and breastfeeding support and integration programs. The European Public Health Alliance (EPHA) [reports](#) on the lasting impact on healthcare and public health, and on the worsening of health inequalities. We call on the EU to push for the representation of all groups in vulnerable situations at local level within planning around the humanitarian response so that their needs are addressed.

5. Empower safe community-led inclusion

Communities are often the first line of reception and support for migrants and refugees. Communities should be involved in reception and inclusion plans and continuously engaged to ensure lasting solidarity. The EU should encourage the development of appropriate safeguarding measures within communities and organisations for anyone engaged in the humanitarian response and reception and inclusion of those fleeing.

6. Support the role of civil society, not-for-profit service providers, social economy enterprises and social partners

The war has shown that civil society is an important actor in times of crisis and can serve as a buffer against impunity, human rights abuses and play a role in facilitating peace. The EU should reflect on the state of civil dialogue at EU level, which is much weaker than other important forms of dialogue including social dialogue. Civil society and social partners should be consulted and engaged in the Solidarity Strategy from the outset. Those organisations who have provided services and helped to include those fleeing should be supported to continue that crucial work with greater access to information regarding funding opportunities and other forms of support. More efforts should be made to ensure access of Ukrainian civil society organisations to existing EU funding mechanisms, to support civil society in the country. Social service organisations and social economy entities should be prioritised in the process of public procurement of services, given their contribution in responding to the needs of target groups and communities in facilitating integration in the labour market.

Preparing for future crises

While the EU's response has been swift, including the launch of Cohesion's Action for Refugees in Europe (CARE), many of our members have had to launch crowdfunding, use their own scarce resources and have found it difficult to access support from the EU and Member States in the immediate aftermath of the war. Social Platform recommends future-proof measures including a rapid response mechanism within EU internal funding regulations that allow for the swift mobilisation of resources within the EU to provide initial basic social needs in cases of crisis, and equal access to mainstream services and infrastructure through cohesion funds. These measures should include support for independent civil society organisations and not-for-profit service providers to access these funds.

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Social Platform is the largest, leading organisation working on social issues. We have strength in numbers and put power back into people's hands who want a more Social Europe. Collectively we unite and give a voice to tens of thousands of organisations and hundreds of millions of people in Europe in all their diversity. EU Transparency Register ID: 85083981189-35



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